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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Almighty God, Your Presence surrounds us, Your love affirms us, Your strength sustains us, Your courage empowers us, Your guidance directs us, and Your joy uplifts us. Thank You for this new day in which we can love You by serving our Nation in the U.S. Senate. Give us a renewed conviction that we are here by Your appointment. As You have placed us in positions of responsibility, You will provide us with exactly what we need in each hour this day. We commit the day to You and look expectantly for Your interventions and inspiration. You are the source of our vision, hope, and perseverance. Bless the Senators and all of us who work with and for them. Remind us that we are all working for You and for Your best for our Nation. You are our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable ROBERT C. BYRD led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nevada, the Democratic whip, is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the time until 6 p.m. will be divided between the two managers. There will be no rollcall votes today. We will, however, vote tomorrow morning, at 10:45, on a nomination from the White House.

GREATER ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE PHARMACEUTICALS ACT

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will now resume consideration of S. 812, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 812) to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to provide greater access to affordable pharmaceuticals.

Pending:

Reid (for Dorgan) amendment No. 4299, to permit commercial importation of prescription drugs from Canada.

Graham amendment No. 4309, to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide coverage of outpatient prescription drugs under the Medicare program.

Hatch (for Grassley) amendment No. 4310, to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for a Medicare voluntary prescription drug delivery program under the Medicare program, and to modernize the Medicare program.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 6 p.m. shall be equally divided between the two managers or their designees.

NURSE REINVESTMENT ACT

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 306, H.R. 3487.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The bill (H.R. 3487) to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to health professions programs regarding the field of nursing.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I am proud to rise in support of final passage of the Nurse Reinvestment Act. This bill addresses the critical nursing shortage in our country by getting behind the nurses who take care of us every day. It provides incentives to encourage people to enter the nursing profession and make it a career. This legislation is based on the Nurse Reinvestment Act, S. 1864, that I sponsored with Senators TIM HUTCHINSON, JOHN KERRY, and JIM JEFFORDS.

Since the Senate passed the Nurse Reinvestment Act in December of last year, there is new information showing that the nursing shortage has become even more severe. In Maryland, almost 16 percent of nursing jobs are unfilled, up from 3.3 percent in 1997. There are over 2,000 registered nurse vacancies in Maryland hospitals. Since the average age of a Maryland nurse is 47 years, we face the possibility that the shortage will soon get worse if young nurses do not enter and stay in the profession.

The nursing shortage is not unique to Maryland. It is nationwide. In 2001, the average American hospital vacancy rate was 13 percent for registered nurses. The average age of an American nurse is 44 years, with many retiring in their fifties or working part time due to the physical demands of the job. At the same time, the labor force is shrinking and baby boomers will soon retire and place additional demands on our health care system.

The nursing shortage can have grave consequences on patient care. A recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that nursing shortages in hospitals are associated with a higher risk of complications and even death. It is our duty to take steps to make sure our health care system is staffed with enough qualified nurses.

Nurses care for Americans from the cradle to the grave. We depend on them to care for our parents, our children,

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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